

## Guest Editorial

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# Occupational Work Therapy Practice in South Africa

*“Do not wait; the time will never be ‘just right’. Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools (and skills) you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along”*

Napoleon Hill

Occupational Therapists (OTs) in South Africa who practice in the field of vocational rehabilitation (or work practice) cannot afford to wait for a ‘just right’ time. At this point in time challenges as well as opportunities are many due to the various changes we have experienced over the last few years. In this special edition of *WORK*, we wish to tell our stories and show that we are working with whatever knowledge, skills, and tools that are available to us.

If I had to describe the OTs working in vocational rehabilitation in South Africa I would use words like dedication, commitment, caring, practical, problem-solving, and most of all, *making a difference*. Yes, ‘making a difference’ may sound like a cliché, but it is a phrase or action that really exists in South Africa.

In the development of this issue, we extended an open invitation to all OTs in the field of vocational rehabilitation to submit manuscripts. We thank them all for their contributions and willingness to share their stories. Michelle Janse van Rensburg and Merriel Lane assisted in editing and I wish them sincere thanks.

The articles in this issue are an extract of the difference OTs are making to clients who lack occupational performance in the area of work. In some instances a rigorous empirical approach is needed to make a difference. I refer readers to the outstanding work of Tia-Mari Hoffman in the mining industry. She has made an immense difference in the delivery of rehabilitation to injured workers with the development of the Functional Work Capacity test battery. This instrument is not only aimed at the assessment of work abilities after injury

and subsequent rehabilitation, but it also contributes to solving the mining industry’s dilemma of screening new employees in order for the ‘just right’ job match. Environmental issues which impact on the safety of the mine workers become essential and the simulation of different environments and specific work requirements are the outstanding features of this instrument.

In other instances, a practical model of a program is needed to make a difference. Two committed OTs from a school for learners with special education needs, Leonora Nel and Colette van der Westhuizen took the plunge and developed an excellent school-to-work program to prepare learners for successful placement. Kitty Uys, well known for her experience and passion in Alternative and Augmentative Communication and also the President of the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA), assisted them in making this program public. Leonora and Colette have been taking the challenge further and are currently presenting workshops to influence heads of schools for learners with special needs to be more committed to implementing this program and thus aiding successful placement of their senior learners.

In other instances, examples of successful individual cases are needed to make a difference and inspire other OTs to follow suit. Matty van Niekerk (also from a school for learners with special education needs) displays her passion to assist learners in successful placement with a unique career exploration program. The program is well integrated into the academic curriculum and is a collaborative effort between teachers, therapists and parents. She tells the stories of two learners who participated successfully in this 4-day program and evaluates the success of the program.

Making a difference for clients in the area of work depends on successful training at undergraduate and graduate level. The OT department at the University of

Pretoria has a successful and comprehensive training strategy for vocational rehabilitation. Tania Buys and I described the training of vocational rehabilitation and trust that other educators will find this useful.

Currently, many OTs are making a difference in the lives of clients with functional capacity evaluations from various referral sources. As experienced and well known OT's in the field, Hester van Biljon and Tania Buys convey their successful method of performing Functional Capacity Evaluations in their reports. Hester and Tania are also respected for their enthusiastic contributions since the late 1980's towards promoting vocational rehabilitation services, organizing and presenting many workshops and opportunities for professional development and forming a work group on vocational rehabilitation. All these efforts culminated in a one-year postgraduate diploma program which Tania developed. She presents it at the University of Pretoria and it is the only post-graduate program for vocational rehabilitation in South Africa.

South Africa, with its rich cultural, political and socio-economic diversity presents some challenges for OTs where managed health care, evidence-based practice or outcomes-based practice may not be viable options. Margot Graham took on a challenge and developed a method for rural community rehabilitation workers to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities in remote rural areas of the most disadvantaged province in South Africa – the Eastern Cape. She developed (amongst others) a Work Abilities Web (WAW) where rehabilitation workers could be empowered to do a job fit of people with disabilities (PwD) to community projects. This was part of her PhD studies. Margot is currently the head of the Occupational Therapy department at the University of Pretoria.

The difference that Karen Brink makes is evident from her article about the use of activities as the unique contribution of the OT in assessments of malingering. Many OTs are currently concerned that the use of activities is losing its unique place in OT but Karen's practice shows us that it is still alive and extremely important. She describes the Layered Assessment Model and indicates how activities play an essential role in multiple data sources and methods as well as in triangulation of findings.

We believe that making a difference in any client with activity limitations and participation restrictions is largely dependent on the level of motivation of that client. Many OT's in South Africa prefer using Vonda du Toit's Theory of Motivation and Action (or Model of Creative Ability) to determine the level of motivation. This theory guides them in terms of a starting point for assessment and intervention as well as principles for improved participation. I attempted to give a concise explanation of the theory while Helé de Vos added a case study to illustrate the use of this theory in practice. Helé points out that the Model is extremely useful with clients whose participation is erratic or extremely restricted and where standardized assessments for medico-legal work do not explain the poor level of participation in roles and occupations.

Occupational therapy students can be applauded for the difference they are making in peoples lives in some communities where no OTs are available. Marlene Olivier and Lauri Oosthuizen embarked upon a project in a semi-rural community. They compiled a program for teachers at a workshop for adults with disabilities to assist the teachers to train workers in prevocational and selected vocational skills. Marlene and Laurie received much credit and appreciation from the head of the workshop as well as from the teachers. This program is now running and will be followed-up by future students.

I trust that the readers will enjoy the stories of OTs in South Africa and envy us for the opportunities we have, the way we solve problems, the commitment evident from the articles (even if resources and services are not always available) and the work satisfaction we receive from making a difference.

Thank you to Karen Jacobs for this opportunity to showcase the vocational rehabilitation practices in South Africa. Your enthusiasm and warmth encourage us to move to higher levels of performance.

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